DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 938 IR 007 225

AUTHOR	Barry, Sharon; And Others
TITLE	The Secret of Little Ned. Listening to Children: Children Should Be Seen and Heard. Student Guide--Footsteps. Report Number 12.
INSTITUTION	Applied Management Sciences, Inc., Silver Spring, Md.; Educational Film Center, Springfield, Va.; Maryland Univ., College Park. Inst. for Child Study.
SPONS AGENCY	Bureau of School Systems (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	79
NOTE	17p.; For related documents, see IR 007 212-233 and IR 007 396; Best copy available
AVAILABLE FROM	University Park Press, 233 East Redwood Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202 (Student Guide Kit, one of each program, 1-20, $5.95 per kit); Reference Section, National Audiovisual Center, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C. 20409 (Films and tapes only)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Child Development; *Childhood Interests; Childhood Needs; Child Rearing; Early Childhood; *Educational Television; Family Life Education; Family Relationship; *Listening Skills; Parent Child Relationship; *Parenthood Education; *Psychological Needs; Self Esteem

ABSTRACT

This student guide for a program focusing on listening as a way for parents to get to know their children and show them that they care discusses the different ideas and feelings young children have to talk about, the ways in which they express their concerns, and how parents can hear and respond to both their verbal and nonverbal messages. Designed around a magazine format to allow maximum flexibility to different groups using the materials, the guide is divided into seven sections: (1) an overview of the theme and contents; (2) a summary of the major learnings of the theme; (3) feature articles containing the major content and including practical suggestions for parents; (4) a film review section which includes a synopsis of the accompanying film program and a related discussion question; (5) three activities aimed at both individual and group participation; (6) a selection of field activities, discussion questions, and research topics designed to reinforce the ideas presented in the articles and meet the needs of a wide variety of classroom groups; and (7) a bibliography for further reading on the theme. (Author/JEG)

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LISTENING TO CHILDREN:

CHILDREN SHOULD BE SEEN AND HEARD

ED169938

The Secret of Little Ned

Student Guide

Anne Rouse

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A world to be born under your footsteps...
St.-John Perse

FROM THE EDITORS

There are different kinds of listening. We can listen for information, as we do in a history lecture or during the evening news. Or, we can listen "between the lines." This kind of listening takes into account the texture of words — the emotions and feelings they express, what is *not* being said as well as what *is* being said.

This is the kind of listening you will be reading about in this booklet. You will learn about the different ideas and feelings young children have to talk about, the ways in which they express their concerns, and how parents can hear and respond to what they are saying.

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THE BIG IDEAS

- Listening to children is as important as talking with them.
- Children do not always express their thoughts and feelings in ways that are clear to parents.
- By paying attention to children's verbal and nonverbal messages, parents can learn more about what their children are thinking and feeling.

STOP

LOOK

LISTEN

LISTENING: *The Better to Hear You With*

"Kids. What do they have to say?"

A lot. Yet many parents think they having nothing to learn from their children. Some even assume they know just what their children are thinking and feeling all the time. And so they end up talking to children much more than they listen.

But talking is just half of the process of communication. The other half is listening. Listening is one of the best ways parents can get to know their children. Listening is a window into how children think, feel and learn. It is also one of the best ways parents can show their children they care.

In the following excerpts from an imaginary diary, a mother describes how she learned to listen to her two young children.

May 10

Dear Diary,

Today at the grocery store I overheard two women talking. One was saying: "I've given up trying to understand my son. Nothing he says or does makes one bit of sense to me."

Her friend replied: "I know what you mean. But at least your son still talks to you. My daughter hardly says a word to me. . ."

A familiar story, I thought to myself, and moved on to the check-out counter. Then on the way to the car I passed a group of young people. "My folks don't understand me at all," one was complaining. "Yeah," sympathized another. "My dad never listens to me, and my mom. . ."

Hearing these two conversations right on top of each other got me to wondering. Cheryl is just 6 now, and Bobby only 4, and as a rule we're pretty close. But will there come a day when we, too, will stop listening and talking to each other? I certainly hope not. . .

May 12

Dear Diary,

Those two conversations I overheard last Saturday have really got me thinking about my relationship with my own kids. This morning, for example, Cheryl came storming into the house, went into her bedroom, and slammed the door. I thought I'd better find out what was wrong, so I asked her what the matter was. Our conversation went something like this:

Cheryl: "That Judy is so stupid. I hate her!"
Me: "It's not nice to hate people, dear. You should try to like everybody."
Cheryl: "Well, I don't like Judy. I hate her. Tomorrow I'm going to trip her and make her fall flat on her face."
Me: "Now, Cheryl. I know you don't mean that. You don't want to hurt your friend."
Cheryl: "Yes, I do. And she's not my friend. She's mean!"
Me: "Maybe you haven't been very nice to Judy. Did you do something to make her angry?"
Cheryl: "No, she's just mean. It's all her fault."
Me: "Now, Cheryl, nothing is ever the fault of just one person. Usually both people are to blame. Why don't you invite Judy over and you can have some lemonade and be friends again."
Cheryl: "I don't wanna be friends with Judy. And I don't want her to come to my house. I hate her!"
Me: "Cheryl, I asked you not to talk like that. I think you're just cranky and tired. Now go upstairs to bed, and maybe after you have a nap you'll feel better."

Well, Cheryl didn't feel better after her nap. She was more upset than before, and I felt terrible.

What a day!

May 13

Dear Diary,

I was talking to Bonnie today, and she started telling me about the parent group she goes to on Thursday nights. One of the things they've been talking about is the need for parents to listen to their children. As parents, we talk to our kids a lot. We lecture and preach. We judge and direct. We blame and scold. But only rarely do we just. . . listen. And even when we do, it may be with only one ear.

As Bonnie was talking, something clicked inside my head. I thought back on my conversation with Cheryl yesterday. Sure enough:

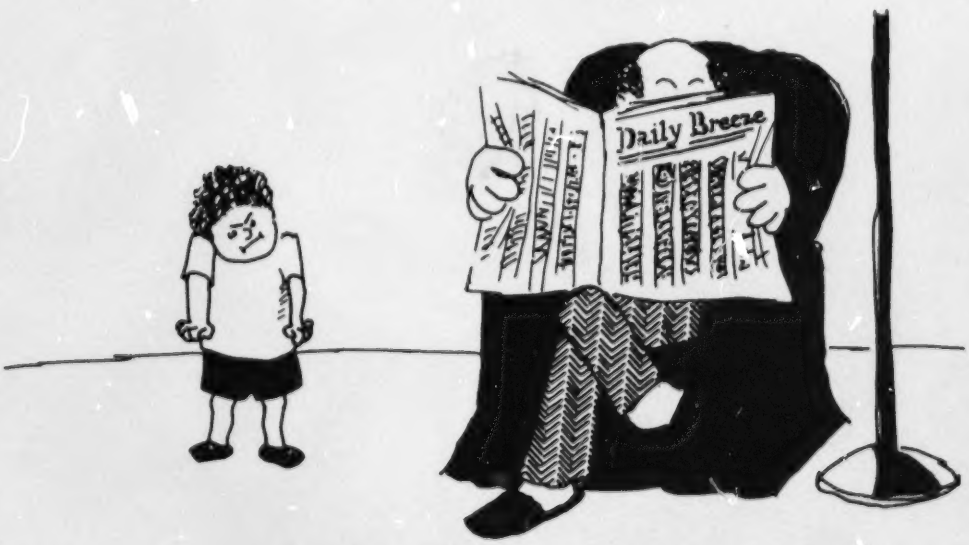
I lectured.
I interpreted what she said.
I blamed her.
I gave her advice.
I ordered her.

I did everything but listen. If I had, I might have found out what was troubling her, and we both would have felt a lot better.

Then I started thinking back to other times when my husband and I thought we were listening to Bobby and Cheryl. I remembered incidents like this:

"Daddy?"
"Mmmmmmmm."
"I cleaned up my room today all by myself."
"Mmmmmmmm."
"Daddy?. . . DADDY!"
"What is it, Cheryl?"

Because my husband heard Cheryl's words, he thought he was listening to her and couldn't understand why she was so upset. But Cheryl wanted his full undivided attention, and she knew she wasn't getting it. She knew he wasn't really listening. I hate to admit it, but in our case what Bonnie said was right on target. . .



May 20

Dear Diary,

I came across an article on listening in a magazine today and tore out this clipping:

In Active Listening, the person who listens is as important as the speaker. Parents who listen in this way try to help their children understand what they are thinking and feeling, for:

Children can't always say
exactly what they mean.

For example, "I don't like the new baby" could really mean "I'm scared you don't love me anymore."

By listening actively, parents help children explore and sort out such feelings. Often — just by putting their thoughts into words and sharing them with someone — children can find solutions to their own problems.

There are different ways parents can let their children know they're listening. Sometimes responses like "Oh" or "I see" are enough. At other times, children need some encouragement to continue. In such a case, a parent might say: "Tell me more." Or, "Go on, I'm listening."

Sometimes there's no need to say anything. An alert silence can let a child know a parent is listening closely and thinking about what is being said. At other times, though, a parent may have to ask questions or repeat the child's question to be sure he or she understood what was being said.

It sounds like a lot of work, but it does make sense. It's certainly worth keeping in mind. . .

May 25

Dear Diary,

When I came home from work today, Bobby seemed upset. I decided this was a good time to try out what I've learned about active listening. This is how things went.

Bobby: "Mrs. O'Grady is really dumb."
Me: "You're angry at Mrs. O'Grady?"
Bobby: "Yes. She's a stupid babysitter. She thinks Cheryl's so nice. Cheryl's just a dummy."
Me: "Oh, dear. You're angry at your sister, too?"
Bobby: "Yes. She gets to do everything — just because she's bigger. She thinks she's such a big shot."
Me: (Silence)
Bobby: "Like today she got to go to the movies with her friends. And I had to stay home. It's not fair just she got to go."
Me: "You wanted to be able to go to the movies, too?"
Bobby: "Yes. But Mrs. O'Grady wouldn't let me. She said I have to wait 'til I'm older. Boy, is she dumb."
Me: "What else happened?"
Bobby: "I cried. And Cheryl called me a baby and said that's why I couldn't go to the movies."
Me: "So Cheryl teased you, and that made you feel even worse?"
Bobby: "Yes. She thinks she's so big."
Me: "Sounds like today wasn't a good day for you. I'm sorry to hear that, because you're a very special person, too. Did you know that?"
Bobby: "Me?"
Me: "Yes, you. And you know what else?"
Bobby: "What?"
Me: "It's only 6:30 and you don't have to go to bed for another hour, so we have time to think up something fun to do together."
Bobby: "Just you and me?"
Me: "Just the two of us. So what'll it be, little shot?"

Mrs. O'Grady is a very good babysitter, and I also know that Bobby really likes her. If I reminded Bobby of that, or scolded him for being angry, I would only have upset him more. So instead, I tried to find out what was really bothering him. Once I learned that he was just feeling left out, it was easy to find a way to let him know that he, too, is very important to us.

That wasn't very hard at all. It seems that listening to your children is largely a matter of instinct and common sense. . .

June 5

Dear Diary,

Yesterday when I went to pick Cheryl up from nursery school, I stayed and talked with her new teacher for a while. I mentioned our recent efforts to listen better to Cheryl and Bobby, and she said that listening is a skill that she, as a teacher, has had to work on too. She said that she learns a lot about children in her class by "listening" to their facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, gestures, and movement. This **Body Language** *is one of the most effective methods of communication children have. Their* **Behavior,** *too, she said, often speaks louder than words.*

On the bus home, I thought about how Cheryl and Bobby still use their bodies to express their feelings. When Cheryl is sad, for example, we can tell by the way her shoulders droop and the way she drags her feet. When Bobby is excited, his eyes light up and he talks nonstop.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that children have lots to say, and lots of ways to say it. It's just up to us to listen . . .

June 25

Dear Diary,

Last night, Sam and I were talking about Cheryl and Bobby. We realized that we've both learned a lot more about them since we started talking less and listening more. It's been fascinating looking at how their minds work and how they learn. We feel a lot closer to them and we think that by showing them we value what they have to say, we've given their self-confidence a healthy boost.

By and large, we've been pretty successful in our efforts to listen more actively to our children. There have been some flops, of course. Usually these failures happen when we don't really have our minds on what our kids are saying, or when we go overboard and ask too many questions. Our successes, on the other hand, seem to result when we do these three things:

LET OUR CHILDREN KNOW WE'RE AVAILABLE TO LISTEN.

We try to listen to Cheryl and Bobby right when they need us. Sometimes we have to put down the newspaper or turn off the iron in order to give them our full attention.

Sometimes, though, we just can't listen when our kids want us to. When this happens, we tell our children *why* we can't listen right then, and *when* we'll be able to.

TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT OUR CHILDREN ARE TRYING TO SAY.

We've learned that interrupting children or making judgments about what they're saying does not lead to understanding. Instead, we try to watch, listen, and, if necessary, ask questions or repeat what our children have said. We keep asking ourselves: What are they thinking, feeling, trying to say? Listening comes a lot easier when we follow our children's cues and let them lead the way.

ACT ON WHAT WE LEARN FROM LISTENING.

When we've really heard what Cheryl and Bobby are trying to say, Sam and I can be more skillful in helping them. They may need sympathy or more attention. Sometimes they want to share an important moment. At other times they need help figuring out a problem or correcting a misunderstanding. Whatever it is, we try to help. Helping our children understand and accept their own feelings and reactions is a great source of satisfaction to us both.

Sometimes, of course, we don't like what Cheryl and Bobby have to say or the way they behave. Sometimes we don't agree with them. And sometimes we're not sure how to respond. By listening to their point of view and respecting their feelings, though, we can better understand how they see things.

But we still have a lot to learn. . .

FILM
REVIEW
SECTION

The Secret of Little Ned

Laura and Hunter Riley are taking care of their nephew, Little Ned, while his parents attend a wedding. From the moment his parents drop him off, Little Ned seems to have something on his mind. He refuses to let Hunter pick him up, and he is very upset when Laura doesn't notice that he took a phone message all by himself. When Laura laughs at a mistake he makes in the grocery store, and gives him the smaller bag to carry home, Little Ned's irritation increases.

Laura becomes more and more puzzled and upset by Little Ned's hostility to her and her inability to understand why he is so unhappy. She feels even worse after Hunter takes Little Ned to help load wood and has no problem at all with him. Then, when Little Ned brings down a beer can that Hunter had left upstairs, Laura thinks back on the day's events and discovers his secret. When Little Ned's family returns, they find him happily helping Hunter fix the roof.

WHAT WAS LITTLE NED'S SECRET?

ACTIVITY PAGES

activity #1
WHO'S LISTENING?

Think of someone you know who is a good listener, and another person who doesn't listen well. Write a paragraph or two about each person, describing:

why you like, or don't like, to talk to that person
how the person responds to what you say
how that person makes you feel
when you seek that person out

activity #2
BODY TALK

Our behavior and body language often express our thoughts and feelings even more clearly than words. Use facial expressions, gestures, posture, body movement, and actions — but not words — to express different emotions. Pretend, for example, that:

You are angry.

You feel sad.

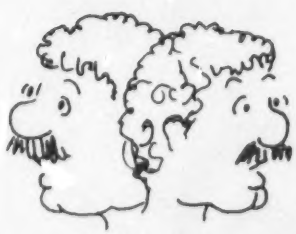
You want attention.

You are afraid.

You are happy.

You feel defeated.

You are confused.



activity #3
WHAT'S GOING ON?

Sometimes children's words don't clearly show what they're thinking and feeling. Sometimes parents have to listen and observe very carefully to hear what a child is really saying.

Take turns role-playing each of the following situations with your classmates. In each situation, one student should take the part of the child, and another the parent. When you're finished, have the rest of the class discuss:

what cues the child gave about his or her feelings and thoughts
how effective the parent's responses were
what else the parent could have done

Situation #1

What Mr. Antonioni knows is:
At the dinner table 5-year-old Arlene just picks at her food. She doesn't even eat her lasagna, and lasagna is her favorite food. When her father asks what's wrong, she just mumbles, "I'm not hungry."

What Mr. Antonioni doesn't know is:
Arlene had a terrible day at kindergarten. She spilled chocolate milk on her new dress, she couldn't make her S's come our right, and Tommy Lynch made fun of her new glasses.

Situation #2

What Mrs. Janowski knows is:
Ever since they moved into their new apartment, 18-month-old Wanda has cried every night after being put into her bed. She never did this before.

What Mrs. Janowski doesn't know is:
The neon light on the restaurant across the street shines into Wanda's room after it gets dark and keeps her awake.

Situation #3

What Mr. White knows is:
All of a sudden 4-year-old Stevie won't leave his father's side. He won't go down to the playroom in the basement by himself. He won't even go out to the backyard to play unless someone comes with him. And he puts up a terrible fuss about going to bed at night.

What Mr. White doesn't know is:
When Stevie was home with the babysitter the other night, he saw a movie about a man who kidnapped little children when they were alone.

GRAB BAG

to do

1. Observe children with their parents in stores, parks, playgrounds and other public places. Take notes on:

   who does the most talking
   what you think children are trying to say
   how parents respond to their children's questions, comments, and behaviors

   Share your observations with your classmates.
2. Observe a child regularly over a period of several weeks. Keep a diary of his or her words and actions:
   What do you learn about this child?
   What are his or her concerns, needs, thoughts and feelings?
   How could parents benefit from such a close observation of their children?
3. Invite a child psychiatrist or counselor to talk to your class about the role that listening plays in therapy and how it can be applied to families. Is this a skill that parents can learn?
4. Play "Telephone." This is the game where someone starts a rumor, and then each person whispers it into the ear of the next person. The last person announces what he or she heard, and this is compared with the original rumor. Usually the final version is very different from the first. What does this game tell you about how well we listen to each other?
5. Try listening actively with a child you know. How does it work out? What do you learn?

to discuss

1. Think back to when you were a child:

   Do you remember times when you felt someone wasn't really listening to you?
   How did this make you feel?
   What did you do when it happened?
   Do you still feel that way sometimes?
   How does it affect you now?
   What do you do about it now?
2. Why don't children always say what they mean?
3. What do you suppose are some of the reasons why many adults don't really listen to children? What does this show about their attitude toward children?
4. Do you think listening is becoming a dying art? If so, what might some of the reasons be?
5. Why is it sometimes easier to talk to a stranger — for example, a hairdresser, bartender, or therapist — than to a close friend or family member? Can these casual bonds ever make up for having our loved ones hear us?
6. Do we listen selectively? In other words:
   Do we sometimes hear only what we want to hear — good news but not bad news, for example?
   Do we listen to some people more seriously than to others — males more than females, for example, or people of certain ethnic or racial groups more than others?
   Why does this happen?
7. Did you ever feel that someone didn't really mean what they were saying to you? How were you able to tell what their real thoughts and feelings were?
8. Do adults sometimes need to listen more closely to each other? How might listening actively help strengthen a marriage or other partnership?

GRAB BAG

to research

1. The active listening process as described in Thomas Gordon's book, *Parent Effectiveness Training.*
2. The science of kinesics, or body language.
3. Art and dance therapy. How do children express their thoughts and feelings through art and movement?
4. Poems, stories, and letters written by children. What are some of the things children have to say about themselves and other people and things? (*Kids* magazine is one good source of such material.)

BOOK BROWSING

Here are some books that can give you more information on...

...listening to children

Between Parent and Child. Dr. Haim G. Ginott. New York: Avon Books, 1965. (paperback)

Liberated Parents, Liberated Children. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. New York: Avon Books, 1974. (paperback)

P.E.T., Parent Effectiveness Training. Dr. Thomas Gordon. New York: New American Library, 1970. (paperback)

...listening to body language and behavior

Body Language. Julius Fast. New York: M. Evans and Company, 1970. (paperback)

The Body Language of Children. S. Szasz. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978.

P.S. Your Not Listening. Eleanor Craig. New York: Signet, 1973. (paperback)

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FOOTSTEPS was developed by a consortium of:

Applied Management Sciences
Silver Spring, Maryland

Educational Film Center
Springfield, Virginia

Institute for Child Study of the University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Many people — staff, students, teachers and parents — contributed to the development of these materials. Two people in particular, however, deserve special recognition and thanks: Sharon McIntyre, for her tireless efforts field testing the materials; and June Hamning, for patiently typing — and retyping — these pages.

We also wish to gratefully acknowledge the ongoing support of the Division of Educational Technology, U.S. Office of Education, without whose assistance these materials would not be possible.

© 1979 Applied Management Sciences

Published by

University Park Press
International Publishers in Science, Medicine, and Education
233 East Redwood Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

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